Visual Tools as Enhancers to a Creative Building Process with the Community- A New Visual Live Architectural Education Approach

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All photos in this paper are taken by the author

Aim:

This process aims to decrease the gaps between the students and themselves / students and educators/ and students and community and make them capable of reaching creative thinking in synergetic form towards their own community. It aims to make the students drop their ego and see the value of synergy in creativity that magnifies the value of the resulting product. It aims to make them see how such a free visual process can result in more visually stimulating creative sustainable socio/physical environments that meet the real needs of the community and help promote the abilities of both the community and the students.

Process Description:

Through a set of visual exercises to promote creative abilities based on diverse theories, research and explorations on creativity and visualization, the architecture students have their visual and creative abilities boosted, using varied flexible, free visual tools. The exercises rely to an extent on visual techniques of psychoanalysis of each character, to be able to reach their internal soul and inner eye and release their personal subconscious reticular system. Exercises provoke abstract, free, flexible thinking based on scientific theories and personal explorations, passing gradually through the different needs of the different stages of creativity (preparation, incubation, illumination and finalisation). These exercises integrate all sensors, external socio/physical environment, emotions and memory, all at the right time of the process. The idea of making abstract models and making the design process a 3d visual hands/on process enhances the sense of the 'unknown' and 'involvement, provoking diverse thinking.

This phase includes visual lectures that clarify the impact of space on promoting abilities and behaviours in the different cognitive stages of child development and shaping societies through its physical details (like shapes, colours, material, orientation, design, etc in relation to the magnetic fields it emits) to motivate a sense of obligation and responsibility towards their socio/physical environment. It also includes lectures on

Phases of the Process:

The process passes through two main phases as shown in figure 1:
creativity as a totalistic approach, the impact of different external and internal factors and visual tools in the process.

The phase ends with a project to test their final creative abilities, in relation to different assessments during the course to measure not how creative they are, but rather the positive change towards becoming a creative person, each on an individual level. The more positive the change, the higher the grade. The assessment is explained in detail below. The phase passes through the four main stages of creativity; preparation, incubation, illumination and finalisation, over eight classes and final assessment, as shown in figure 2.

Phase assessment:

The final grade will be divided between the work throughout the year, measuring the change in each student towards becoming a creative visual thinker, in addition to the final project. This project focuses on a space they conceptually and abstractly design for an innovative area they see as essential to solving problems they see as essential to youth and helps boost their creative energy, helping them to find and utilize their potential.

a- The change throughout the phase: this will be measured verbally and visually through
- a questionnaire paper at the start and end of the course, progress in several abstract paintings they produce (measuring vividness in colours, diversity, freedom in flow of colours, confidence while using the brush, and novelty)
- change in character that shows the ability to take confident fast and divergent decisions that are purposeful and of value, more confident in defending and arguing their ideas, more daring (this may be seen in the way they dress, or select their topics to tackle), etc.

b- Final Project: space that helps solve youth/or their personal problems, boost their creativity, and help them realize and enhance their personal potential: this project consists of a visual outcome accompanied by a verbal/visual presentation. The visual outcome may consist of an abstract model (life size/large scale or small scale) of their ideas and concepts, free sketches, movies, a play, songs and dances. Each student is to select the technique most appropriate in delivering their concepts.

The presentation of their work must demonstrate the problem they see facing youth (or personally themselves) and how this space or creation may conceptually solve such problems. They are to be able to defend their topic and verbally/visually present their solutions.

Assessment of the project is focused on the originality of the problem and the conceptual solution, appropriateness of the solution discussed in relation to the problem discussed, vividness both visual and verbal in presenting the problem, storytelling, complexity, purposefulness of spaces designed, their imaginativeness and their value to the problem. Their discussions should show an ability to reach, present the problem, analyze it and confidently defend the conceptual solution.

Figures 3-5 describe the four different phases of the course conceptually.
Figure 4. Incubation stage (using the physical space as a visual tool for inspiration).

Every line, colour, form, material in the physical space may be used to stimulate certain mental and psychological abilities. In reference to this and the different stages, the physical environment is constantly used as a strong visual tool to provoke certain needs in their abilities. Incubation is a very important stage, in which they reach their inner mind and the divergent ideas convert to form a single feasible idea. Openness, pitched roofs, greenery and flowers were found magically positive in this stage.

Figure 5. Illumination and finalization stage- reaching divergent solutions and converting them into a single appropriate-imaginative-purposeful and of value conceptual solution to the problem at hand.

The flexible conceptual models are converted to more detailed, yet flexible models using clay, watercolours, and computers. Using photography, free sketching and computer aided programs, each student presents their ideas and work in the visual manner they choose. No architectural drawings are required (plans or elevations are made according to each personal ability and scaling as relevant - the focus is on the ability to think creatively. Rigidity at this stage will block creative thinking.) This stage must not lose the ‘fun’ that helps maintain the creative thinking flow.

Phase 2:

Similarly the students are to promote the creative abilities of a core group from the local community, made up mainly of children, some women and youth. They are to use a similar visual process and visual tools that have been introduced to them to enhance their creativity within the design studio.
The next step in this phase is to collaboratively design/build educational and cultural nodes in the informal settlement streets and schools through a hands-on process. The steps taken in this phase are explained in figure 6.

Step 1: Enhance creativity of a core group from the community using similar abstract flexible art therapy based on psychoanalysis, visual stimulation and motivation. This is done by the students.

Step 2: Direct diverse ideas and creative thinking of the community towards problems they face in their socio/physical environment using simple visual techniques in expressing their needs, using flexible abstract models and free paintings. This is done by the community themselves motivated by the students.

Step 3: Motivate small hands-on projects and/or conceptual visions for the community’s own visions for improving their socio/physical environment.

Step 4: Assessment: This assesses the students on a personal and collaborative level throughout phase 2 and in relation to phase 1.

- Capability to boost creative abilities of the community and communicate visually with others, measured through difference between the community’s first and final visual drawings and abstracts. (15%) -Synchronizes all different ideas fluently – measured through the resulting product in terms of being homogenous and the amount of ideas from different entities integrated fluently and the controlled process of doing. (10%) - Originality of the product, complexity and its real value in relation to the community. (50%) - Change in character of the students to become more sensitive, cheerful, open-minded, risk takers, diverse, and self-confident, in relation to the beginning of phase 1, and synchronize their personal creativity with others. (shows in their abstract drawings, and everyday life). (25% of the score).
Notes

1 The visual exercises have been built on the previously explained explorations and integrating research in several fields related to creativity, neurology, color therapy, cognitive psychology, built environmental psychology, fengshui, etc.

2 Positive references that may be used: